



WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

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FOURTH-ANNUAL RUTH BADER GINSBURG MEMORIAL RECITAL FEATURES PACIFICA QUARTET & NINA TOTENBERG

The program, which takes place on Sunday, April 12 at 7:30 p.m. at Sixth & I, features two world-premiere works for string quartet, co-commissioned by Washington Performing Arts.

WASHINGTON— Pacifica Quartet and *NPR*'s Nina Totenberg collaborate on "Revolutionary Portraits: Our Better Angels," at **Sixth & I** on **Sunday, April 12 at 7:30 p.m.** The program celebrates the legacy of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the enduring spirit of American transformation.

The concert opens with Florence Price's String Quartet in G Major before presenting two world-premiere works for string quartet and narrator. Gabriela Lena Frank's *The Edge of Everything* is an elegy for environmental pioneer Rachel Carson, and Jennifer Higdon's *Steps for Justice* honors Justice Ginsburg, with text by Patrice Michaels, a vocalist, composer, and Ginsburg's daughter-in-law. The evening concludes with Beethoven's String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, performed with the audacious Grosse Fuge, Op. 133.

Higdon met the late Justice 10 years ago, during the premiere of her work "Cold Mountain" at the Santa Fe Opera. When Washington Performing Arts notified Higdon of the commission, she

immediately knew she wanted to highlight Ginsburg's wisdom and reflections on the law, and greater humanity.

"Justice Ginsburg was an amazing individual with a keen, brilliant mind," Higdon said. "I was so moved by her generosity of spirit to come backstage 10 years ago to meet the cast, the composer, and the librettist of my opera; all of us were starstruck."

Longtime friend of Justice Ginsburg, Nina Totenberg, will serve as the narrator for "Steps for Justice" and "The Edge of Everything," replacing actress Sigourney Weaver, who had to withdraw from the performance due to scheduling conflicts.

In Frank's world premiere piece, Totenberg will inhabit Rachel Carson as a character, building from quiet wonder through defiance into the devastating momentum of the work's climax. The elegy's text, written by MacArthur Fellow, ornithologist, and author J. Drew Lanham, captures Carson's wonder at tide pools, her fury at poisoned fields, and her quiet insistence on kinship with every living thing.

"In setting Drew's text, I worked as dramaturg alongside my role as composer, shaping the words so that the narrator has genuine dramatic scope — room to inhabit Carson as a character, to build from quiet wonder through defiance into the devastating momentum of the central climax, where Carson's tireless labor and the cancer consuming her converge: 'I warned of this. And... it found me first.' The narrator is not someone to be merely accompanied. She is a full member of the ensemble, a fifth voice whose silences are as composed as the quartet's, whose breath and timing shape the music," said Frank.

The concert is the fourth-annual **Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital**—a Washington Performing Arts performance honoring longtime friend of the organization and elevating new work of established and renowned artists. In summer 2021, Washington Performing Arts established the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Fund to celebrate the Justice's life, legacy, and love of music with an annual award and recital in her memory. The Washington Performing Arts Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital serves as a creative initiative connecting Justice Ginsburg's love of music, the esteemed artists she championed and befriended, and the future of the vocal and instrumental arts in which she delighted.

The Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital features artists at any stage of their career who exemplify what Justice Ginsburg most valued in Washington Performing Arts and within the arts more broadly: excellence, innovation, and inclusion. The Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Award

provides financial support towards bringing a special project, performance, or collaboration to life for the Recital.

Tickets to “Revolutionary Portraits: Our Better Angels” are \$80.50, including fees, and are available at www.washingtonperformingarts.org/event/pacifica-quartet

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Pacifica Quartet

With a career spanning three decades, the multiple GRAMMY® Award-winning Pacifica Quartet has achieved international recognition as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. Known for delivering performances that are “engrossing, characterful...with a luminescent tranquility [and] spine-tingling intensity” (The New York Times), the Quartet is celebrated for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and fearless repertory choices. Its sound, distinguished by “warmth of phrasing, dynamic control and superbly coordinated ensemble balance” (Gramophone Magazine), has solidified the ensemble as one of the most essential voices in American chamber music.

The Pacifica Quartet appears this season across North America and abroad, including a world premiere tour of their newest program, American Portraits, with Oscar-nominated film icon Sigourney Weaver at the 92nd Street Y in New York; Washington Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.; and Wigmore Hall in London.

American Portraits is centered on two world-premiere commissions for narrator and string quartet honoring visionaries who helped shape our nation – champion of justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is celebrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon, and environmental trailblazer Rachel Carson by GRAMMY® nominee Gabriela Lena Frank. The 2025-2026 season also brings the Pacifica Quartet to ArtPower at the University of California, San Diego; the Oneppo Chamber Music Series at Yale University; the Calgary Pro Musica Society; Friends of Music; Hillsdale College; Kutztown University Presents; the Eureka Chamber Music Series; and the Linton Chamber Music Series.

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly rose to prominence, winning chamber music’s top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002, the ensemble received Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award and was named to Lincoln Center’s Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two). Four years later, it received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, affirming its position among the foremost American quartets. With

its powerful energy and captivating, cohesive sound, the Pacifica has established itself as the embodiment of the contemporary American string quartet sound.

An ardent advocate for living composers, the Pacifica Quartet has commissioned and premiered works by Keeril Makan, Julia Wolfe, and Shulamit Ran. Ran's *Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory* – commissioned in partnership with the Music Accord consortium, Wigmore Hall, and Tokyo's Suntory Hall – received its New York premiere with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. In 2024, the Quartet premiered James Lee III's *Double Standard* – commissioned by Carnegie Hall and Shriver Hall Concert Series – with soprano Karen Slack. Based on a poem by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, the work was widely acclaimed for its vivid narrative power, with one critic describing the performance's "spine-tingling intensity" (The New York Times).

The Pacifica Quartet has proven itself to be the preeminent interpreter of string quartet cycles, harnessing the group's singular focus and incredible stamina to portray each composer's evolution, often over the course of just a few days. Its acclaimed presentations have included highly praised performances of the complete Carter cycle in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Houston; the Mendelssohn cycle in Napa, Australia, New York, and Pittsburgh; the monumental Shostakovich cycle in Chicago, New York, Montreal, and London; and the Beethoven cycle in New York, Denver, St. Paul, Chicago, Napa, and Tokyo, where the Quartet gave an unprecedented presentation of five concerts in three days at Suntory Hall.

The ensemble's acclaimed discography reflects its adventurous spirit. Its GRAMMY® Award-winning recordings of Elliott Carter's *Quartets Nos. 1-5* on Naxos and the complete Shostakovich cycle on Cedille Records – praised by The Telegraph as "nothing short of phenomenal" – are now reference points for those repertoires.

Other notable collaborations include Leo Ornstein's *Piano Quintet* with Marc-André Hamelin, the *Brahms Piano Quintet* with Menahem Pressler, and the *Brahms and Mozart Clarinet Quintets* with Anthony McGill. Their most recent GRAMMY®-winning album, *Contemporary Voices* (Cedille Records), showcases works by Shulamit Ran, Jennifer Higdon, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich; the Chicago Tribune named it among the "Best Classical Recordings of 2020," praising the Quartet's "unmistakable and apt ferocity." A second recording with Anthony McGill, *American Stories*, featured world premiere recordings by Richard Danielpour, James Lee III, and Ben Shirley, as well as a piece by Valerie Coleman, and was nominated for a 2024 GRAMMY® Award.

Based in Bloomington, Indiana, the Pacifica Quartet has served as full-time faculty and Quartet-in-Residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music since 2012. They previously held

residencies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2003-2012), the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2009-2012), and the University of Chicago, where they served as resident performing artists for 17 years.

Nina Totenberg is NPR's award-winning legal affairs correspondent. Her reports air regularly on NPR's critically acclaimed newsmagazines All Things Considered, Morning Edition, and Weekend Edition. She is the author of the New York Times bestseller "Dinners with Ruth: A Memoir on the Power of Friendships."

ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for 60 years with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, international genres, and more. We also have an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence on the internet, envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events online and in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with four Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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